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**Seniors line up to dance at the Shepherd's Center**

*This is one of five stories profiling projects being funded by the Mary Black Foundation. The foundation funds programs promoting active living and early childhood education.*

**By DUDLEY BROWN**  
Staff Writer

The Shepherd's Center has been serving Spartanburg County's senior citizens for 27 years. They come to learn different languages, creative writing, art and attend lectures on a variety of topics from life in Nicaragua to a history on Southern churches. But, its most popular program by far is line dancing.

Ninety-five of the 350 people enrolled at the center come for line dancing. You'll see men and women with hip and knee replacements dancing to "The Boot Scoot Boogie," there's also people dancing the day after their chemotherapy treatments and widows and widowers seeking a little time with others. The average age of the dancers is 75 and you'll see 50- to 90-year-olds line dancing.

"It provides three things," said Lynda Hurteau, director of the Shepherd's Center, "socialization, physical exercise in a safe environment, and it increases their cogni-

tive skills."

The Shepherd's Center is at First Presbyterian Church, which donates space to the program. Senior citizens can join the Shepherd's Center for \$40 a year.

Line dancing allows people to dance as a group without having to bring a partner. People get in lines and perform the required steps for each dance together.

There are four levels of line-dancing classes at the Shepherd's Center. There are newcomers, beginners, intermediate and a senior group. The classes are offered Wednesdays and Fridays, and it's not uncommon to see people stick around for all four. Each class is an hour long.

About 60 of the center's 95 dancers travel to nursing homes and health fairs across the county, and its dancers are helping other churches and centers establish line-dancing programs. The center will host a national line-dancing workshop this summer that it hopes will attract people from across the country. The Mary Black Foundation is providing the center with a \$12,000 grant to expand the program across the county.

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TIM KIMZEY/STAFF

**Edith Hayes, 73, center, of Boiling Springs and others participate in a line-dancing class at The Shepherd's Center at First Presbyterian Church.**



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## Exercise is made fun with line-dancing classes

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The Shepherd's Center's line dancing classes began in 1991, but they didn't take off until the last few years, Hurteau said. She's not exactly sure why so many people started to come.

"I think when that country music craze hit, it made it more popular," Hurteau said.

Mary Brady said she was the first and only person originally registered for line dancing in 1991. She has a theory as to why the program has caught on.

"We didn't have any men for a long time, and we got a few of them and women kept coming," said Brady jokingly.

Hurteau said each class comfortably holds 40 people, and five men are usually the most found in a class. The exercise is Brady's real theory on the classes' popularity.

"It's exercise that's fun," said Brady, who's had surgery on

both hips. "So much exercise is drudgery, but this is fun."

Doug Pye started line dancing at the Shepherd's Center last fall and said he's lost 10 pounds.

"You breathe better and move muscles you ordinarily wouldn't move," Pye said.

Brady said everyone is encouraged to have fun and not to worry about perfecting the steps.

"We have some with Alzheimer's (and) Lou Gehrig's Disease," Brady said. "We just ask them to move. It doesn't matter if they know the steps. Just move."

Brady's favorite dance is an Irish stepping dance. The Irish dance has four steps and it's similar to the River Dance. Dancers face all four walls at some point during the dance.

Some of the dancers can be seen wearing clogging shoes while others opt for sneakers or

sandals. They'll dance to big band era songs, country and some Elvis Pressley.

"You can do a lot of the dances you do to country music to rhythm and blues and fifties and sixties rock music," said Pat Bell, a retired teacher who leads a dance class.

Bell said it usually takes about two weeks for a person to learn most of the dances.

Edith Hayes is teaching line dancing to 13 people at her church, Cudd Memorial Baptist Church.

"It's exercise and something they enjoy doing," Hayes said.

Hurteau said there isn't room for many more line dancers at the Shepherd's Center, so the center has to start taking the program to other places.

Curt McPhail, program officer with the Mary Black Foundation, said the foundation likes how the Shepherd's Center has utilized its volunteers. It has 10 volunteer instructors teaching line dancing.

McPhail said the center would be a good model for others planning to start a line dancing program.

"The fact they're willing to take that out in the county to other locations is really exciting in the potential of an organization," McPhail said.

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Line dancers work out at The Shepherd's Center at First Presbyterian Church in Spartanburg